



Maricopa County
Department of Public Health

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WeArePublicHealth.org

August 23, 2010

Dear Superintendent:

With the school year well underway, you must be inundated with requests. Please add me to the list.

I'm asking again for your help with the flu. We can turn what we learned from last year's flu pandemic into a lasting benefit for our community. We can save our community \$millions, prevent tens of thousands of illnesses, thousands of hospitalizations, and perhaps hundreds of deaths. And by the way, we can significantly decrease school absenteeism, too.

But whether we do it depends entirely upon you.

Last year was a crazy time. In the midst of all your budget cuts and increased educational requirements, we asked for your help in controlling the H1N1 influenza pandemic. I can't thank you enough for all of the effort we got from schools in Maricopa County.

It worked. Given the rushed plans, vaccine shortage, and public misinformation and controversy, we got an astounding number of kids vaccinated. I also think it was the focus of the schools on hygiene and on sending sick kids home that delayed the start of our 2nd wave here by weeks. Your efforts helped to curb what could have been a much worse flu season.

This year, we don't know exactly what to expect, but there are some new twists. The H1N1 vaccine is now part of our regular seasonal flu vaccine so at least there will only be one vaccine needed. Many kids younger than age 9 will still require two doses to insure that they build adequate immunity. On top of that, the CDC has finally recommended flu vaccine for ALL people aged 6 months and over.

Our goal is always to work towards "herd immunity" in our community. That is, getting enough kids vaccinated so that the disease has a hard time spreading. Being able to immunize kids in their schools really is the driving factor in achieving this goal. In a recent study conducted by our department, we found that **parents of school-aged children in Maricopa County say that they would be more likely to vaccinate their child for influenza if their child's school offered an influenza vaccine clinic.**

I recognize that for many of you, a flu clinic is a disruption to your school day. But please consider the big picture. Healthy kids are a win-win for our community and for the educational system. Keeping kids in their seats means they are better prepared for testing and it means greater funding for our schools.

We've learned a lot about what types of school-based vaccination worked best. For example, clinics that were held during the school day and at each school had higher vaccination rates than after-school clinics or those offered only at feeder schools. And you no doubt learned some hard lessons about what worked and didn't work for your own school's functioning.

With all that we learned and with the momentum from last year, I know it is in the best interest of public health to continue school-based flu vaccine clinics. Research says that if we create genuine herd immunity in the schools, we can eliminate 90% of the burden of flu from our entire community. But I obviously can't do it without the active involvement from you.

I understand that many of you have already been contacted by mass immunizers like Mollen Immunizations to hold school-based flu clinics again this year, and I am asking you to sincerely consider this option, or to use other providers such as school nurses, or in some cities, your firefighters who have been trained to vaccinate.

We are working with the Arizona Department of Health Services and mass immunizers like Mollen to build a system where our insured kids are billed through insurance and our uninsured and underinsured kids are not turned away. In order to make sure we have enough vaccine for our schools, we need to get our school clinics scheduled ASAP.

In talking with Mollen Immunizations, they can give priority scheduling to anyone who can commit soon. To ensure that we can meet Mollen's vaccine demand for our uninsured kids, we need all requests for flu clinics no later than September 10, 2010.

If you have questions, please don't hesitate to contact me directly by email or phone (shown below). Thanks you in advance for doing your part in stopping the spread of flu in our community, and as always, thank you for your service to our children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob England, MD".

Bob England, MD, MPH

Director

Maricopa County Department of Public Health

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